Introduction. Lebanon Facing the Arab Uprisings. A Lost Opportunity?

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Late 2010 and early 2011 represented a turning point in the Arab world. The uprisings that erupted in Tunisia and then propagated into Egypt, Libya, Syria, Yemen and Bahrain caused, at least in certain cases, the fall of long-term authoritarian leaders, paving the way to a process that is, in many ways, revolutionary and initiating a vigorous debate on the future of the region.[2]

In this context, Lebanon, an exception in the region due to its consociational system, has been untouched by the wave of protests; according to some, the country has lost an historic opportunity to change its communitarian structure and the balance of power among the various confessions (el Issawi 2011; Asfour 2012).

The "sectarian issue", indeed, is at the core of the debate on the transformation of the state and Lebanese society, an issue that has informed the development of the republic since its formation, focusing in particular on the well-known Article 95 of the Lebanese Constitution, which provides for the gradual abolition of confessionalism.[3] Could the Arab uprisings be considered as a "big bang moment," capable of shaking the Lebanese consociational system and overcoming Article 95? At least in part, in the aftermath of the protests that erupted in the region, the Lebanese viewed the riots as an opportunity to challenge sectarianism. As a consequence, in early 2011, several protests erupted in many Lebanese cities, adopting the slogan of the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings, "the people want to topple the regime," and readapting it as "the people want to topple the sectarian regime."[4] The protests only involved a small number of participants, lacking strong coordination and, consequently, they have failed to have a major impact (Fakhoury 2011). Such protests, however, have made the Lebanese people remember another "spring" that erupted in the country in 2005 following the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafīq Ḥarīrī. Ideally, these more recent protests represent a continuation of those demonstrations in claiming the abolition of sectarianism (Corm 2011). The 2005 protests, though they had initially highlighted the need to overcome sectarianism, later led to a polarization of the confessional positions crystallized around the opposing coalitions of 14 and 8 March. The "Lebanese spring" of 2005, while showing widespread discontent among the population, especially regarding the sectarian issue, did not lead to change in the confessional arrangements reached with the al-Ṭā'if Agreement in 1989. The failure of the "Lebanese spring" is certainly an important element in order to understand the current political developments in the country as well as to comprehend the limited consequences that the Arab uprisings have had on it from this point of view. It is necessary to emphasize, however, that the impact of the Arab uprisings on Lebanon cannot be measured merely on the basis of the effects of "claim and protest" that they would (or would not) have induced in the country. The revolts gradually caused apprehension and concern in the

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[2] The number of publications written after the uprisings is so vast that, from 2011 to the present, appropriate reading lists have been published. Here we suggest two reading lists, a Francophone one http://goo.gl/VogQH8 and a Anglophone one http://goo.gl/FiqzQm

[3] Article 95 of the Lebanese Constitution involved the proportional sub-division of the political and administrative roles among the communities, institutionalizing the confessional system. One of the paragraphs expressly declares that this occurs in a transitory way and that this system would be abolished gradually. See Lebanese constitution http://goo.gl/qWU4ar.

[4] See, for example, Lebanon Wire, *Anti-sectarian protests reject support from Lebanon leaders*, 18 March 2011, http://goo.gl/fpcpFC.

"country of the Cedars" considering the tangible effects that occurred in Lebanon, especially after the Syrian uprising turned into a civil war.

The presence of Syrian refugees (now in excess of one million[5]), the growth of Sunni extremist groups, the marginalization of certain Lebanese historic communities, the difficulties of some key actors such as Ḥizb Allāh, social discontent and changes in regional alliances are only some of the issues that the Lebanese political elites have to tackle. If the above-mentioned issues are a direct result of the 2011 uprisings, which led to the outbreak of civil war in Syria, then by the end of the war with Israel in 2006 the Lebanese political forces had displayed severe struggles as shown by times of political vacuum and armed clashes (the battle of Nahr al-Bārid refugee camp in 2007[6] and the "facts of 2008"[7]). However, at least when this introduction was written,[8] the willingness to exercise restraint and caution, especially as regards the development of the Syrian crisis, and, more generally, regarding changes in regional events seems to prevail as proven by adherence to the Baʿabdā Declaration.[9]

Against this backdrop, this special issue of *Oriente Moderno* aims to examine in greater depth the situation in Lebanon in the aftermath of the protests in the Arab world, seeking to provide a complete (albeit not exhaustive) picture of the transformations taking place in the "country of the Cedars". Two dimensions will be considered: the internal dimension and the external dimension, namely how Lebanon reflects the changes in the region. This special issue has been developed upon these two axes and consists of seven papers. Four papers (Kiwan, Corm, Meier and Trombetta) were drafted in 2013 and the remaining three (Di Peri, Mazzuccotelli and Carpi) in 2014. Contributions were written by Lebanese and European scholars with different disciplinary approaches in order to guarantee a varied theoretical background.

The issue begins with two overarching papers whose goal is to provide an overall picture of Lebanon in the aftermath of Arab uprisings, tapping, respectively, into two crucial issues for the socio-political structure of the country, namely the transformation of the social fabric and that of the economic environment. The first essay, written by Fadia Kiwan, provides the reader with an overview of the complex world of Lebanese civil society in the light of the sectarianism that permeates the country's socio-political structure. What does it mean to talk about civil society in a country typified by confessionalism? In the first part of her paper, Kiwan addresses this issue by highlighting how the existence of multiple appurtenances in Lebanon often leads to a conflict between the "communitarian society" and the "civil society",

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[5] See Migration Policy Center dedicated Website http://goo.gl/InJkEA

[6] The Fataḥ al-Islām movement, led by Šayḫ Šākir al-ʿAbsī, with its basis in the Palestinian refugee camp of Nahr al-Bārid, on the outskirts of Tripoli, was severely attacked by the Lebanese army, under the pretext of pursuing an officer responsible for a bank robbery in Tripoli. After months of siege, affiliates to the group were dispersed and al-ʿAbsī disappeared, only to be killed a year later by Syrian security forces. See ICG (2012).

[7] In May 2008, Lebanon witnessed an open conflict between the Shiite community led by Hizbullah and the army for the first time since the end of the civil war. The pretext for the conflict was the removal of some heads of Shiite intelligence in key sectors of the Ḥizb Allāh party, which sparked the immediate reaction of the latter with consequent urban guerrilla warfare that spread into the streets of the Lebanese capital. After difficult mediation, the parties found a new confessional compromise, the al-Dūḥah Agreement (21 May 2008). The compromise unlocked the impasse that had, by then, lasted for months, leading to the election of a new president of the Republic, Michel Sulaymān, on 23 May 2008, the revision of the electoral law (approved in September) and the launch of a new economic policy (Di Peri 2009).

[8] This introduction was written in July 2014.

[9] The Baʿabdā Declaration is an agreement among the Lebanese political forces, signed in July 2012. It envisages Lebanon's neutrality with respect to the regional events while also hoping for an attitude of mutual respect and cooperation among the parties. Article Two states: "Parties should commit to laying the foundations of stability; safeguarding public order; preventing violence and the country's descent into strife; and intensifying the search for the political means to secure those objectives". See the document in General Assembly Security Council, Baʿabdā Declaration, http://goo.gl/v6eO7B.

making it difficult to navigate between these two concepts. The lens of communitarian society versus civil society is the one that Kiwan uses, firstly, to retrace the steps that have characterized the development of the voluntary sector in the aftermath of the Lebanese civil war and, later, to reconstruct a "map" of the most active Lebanese movements within the country today. This reconstruction is accompanied by an in-depth reflection on whether and how these movements and associations can represent, in wake of the changes that occurred with the Arab uprisings, a valid alternative to the communitarian society today, an effective stimulus that could lead to a greater democratization of the country. The emerging picture is composite and often contradictory, but, despite the difficulties, the non-communitarian society seems to offer opportunities not only inside but also outside the country, namely, the push for a re-appropriation of their spaces of action, eroded over the years by the power of the traditional confessional leaders (*zuʿamāʾ*).

The second overarching paper in this special issue is written by Georges Corm. What was the impact of the Arab uprisings on the Lebanese economy? Corm's answer to this question is twofold. On the one hand, he addresses the current situation in comparative perspective, looking at the other crises that have hit Lebanon since its independence. According to Corm, the current situation cannot be understood without bearing in mind the backbone of the Lebanese economy. On the other hand, before entering into the detail of macro-economic data, Corm highlights the main political issues (internal and external), which are having a strong destabilizing effect on the country and, consequently, on its economy. Moving on to the analysis of macro-economic data, Corm focuses on a datum that is perhaps unexpected and somewhat paradoxical, namely, the overall resilience of the Lebanese economy to the crises that took place in the country after the 2005 assassination of Rafīq Ḥarīrī. As the author illustrates with great clarity, through graphs and tables, various factors contributed to the resilience of the Lebanese economy: the large-scale migratory flows inside and outside the country, the presence of a rentier economy prospering on the basis of considerable flows of capital from abroad and, with the Syrian crisis, the presence of Syrian refugees in search of basic goods as well as accommodation and other fundamental services. Of course, faced with stability and often high-levels macro-economic indicators, Lebanon is, now as in the past, a two-speed country: alongside a "Lebanon Monte Carlo" marked by the solidity of the banking and financial sectors lies a country whose poverty rate is very high, where the regional gap is wide, where there is a dearth in facilities and basic services, and where the presence of Syrian refugees is likely to have a disastrous impact on already vulnerable Lebanese groups. According to Corm, it is the "Monte Carlo" economy that guarantees the resilience of the Lebanese economy, resting on the shoulders of the poorest regions of the country

Moving from the general to the specific and considering the internal/external axis, the special issue continues with Lorenzo Trombetta's paper, which looks at the "non-effects" of the Arab uprisings on Lebanon. If the current narrative, accredited both by the media and a large number of scholars, is a country for years "on the brink of a new civil war", a narrative that would be exacerbated by the spill-over effects of the Syrian civil war on Lebanon, Trombetta goes beyond this narrative by looking in detail at the evolution of the political situation in Lebanon in recent years. Through a precise reconstruction of the development of the relations between the two major Lebanese political parties, Ḥizb Allāh and al-Mustaqbal, and by analyzing the relations among the confessional leaders (*zuʿamāʾ*) in some regions such as the Akkar and the Hermel, which became strategic in the aftermath of the Syrian crisis, Trombetta demonstrates how Lebanon has been able to juggle skilfully the repercussions of the Syrian crisis and the internal tensions, showing a rare exercise in flexibility. If, as emphasized by Trombetta, Lebanon's stability after the civil war had been to some extent guaranteed by the so-called "Syrian protectorate" over the country, the weight loss of the Syrian presence on the Lebanese politics would seem to open new spaces, as the Baʿabdā

Declaration and the moderation of positions within the Lebanese political spectrum in favour of the stability of the system seem to show.

Rosita Di Peri's paper focuses on similar positions but looks at the Lebanese situation within the broader picture of regional transformations. Di Peri demonstrates how interpreting the evolution of the regional geopolitical environment in terms of the binary contraposition between Sunnis and Shiites has produced a new dominant meta-narrative, which is used to interpret any changes in the regional order. Such a reading has also produced tangible effects on the understanding of Lebanese politics, where the sectarianization narrative seems to prevail, especially in the wake of the outbreak of the Syrian crisis. By choosing to analyze the evolution of the Sunni and Shi'a communities in Lebanon, the two most politically active communities after the end of the civil war, Di Peri not only shows that the sectarian contraposition is deeply rooted in Lebanon, a *pars constituent* of its system, but, more importantly, that, despite the rhetoric, both communities tend to have more pragmatic and accommodating attitudes instead of exacerbating sectarian confrontation as the afore-mentioned meta-narrative tends to impose. While it is true that each community has witnessed the radicalization of certain positions and that major changes are taking place, those have been fuelled by the narrative that is emerging at the regional level, which Di Peri defines as "sectarian pan-Islamism" and not by a desire to bring the country to the brink of the abyss.

The internal/external perspective is emphasized in Francesco Mazzuccotelli's paper. He analyzes the positions of one of the main actors of Lebanese politics, namely Hizbullah, with respect to the Arab uprisings. Mazzucotelli examines Ḥizb Allāh's vision with reference to the external dimension, which is how, according to the "Party of God", the Arab uprisings could be interpreted as part of the struggle that sees a "logic of hegemony" opposed to the "anti-imperialist resistance". As argued in the paper, the transposition of the analysis from the internal to the external (regional and international) allows Mazzuccotelli to focus not so much on the effects of the Arab uprisings in the construction of a more democratic region, but rather on the repositioning of the various regional and international actors with respect to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and Israeli-American hegemonic plans for the region.

Lastly, the papers of Daniel Meier and Estella Carpi focus on the tangible effects of the Arab uprisings on Lebanon, concentrating on the issue of Syrian refugees in the "country of Cedars" from two different perspective and disciplinary approaches.

Daniel Meier looks at the issue of Syrian refugees in Lebanon from an historical perspective, comparing it to the presence of other refugees in Lebanon, namely the Palestinians, and analyzes the issue with reference to current events. In the past, Meier argues, the positioning of the various political and social forces in relation to the Palestinian presence in Lebanon was a useful tool to test the inter-communitarian relationship. Similarly, the positioning of the two antagonistic parties in the two government coalitions, al-Mustaqbal (Sunni) and Ḥizb Allāh (Shiite), with respect to Syria and, consequently, the presence of Syrian refugees in the country, is the lens through which Meier observes the evolution and transformation of the two parties. While his argument does not support the binary vision of the clash between Sunnis and Shiites, Meier maintains that the presence in each of the two groups of so-called "entrepreneurs of violence" could destabilize an already highly polarized political landscape, causing unexpected and potentially destructive consequences.

Estella Carpi's essay, on the other hand, looks at the presence of Syrian refugees in Lebanon through the broader lens of humanitarianism. Carpi refers to two key moments in the recent history of Lebanon: the humanitarian emergency following the war with Israel in 2006 and that occurred after the mass arrival of Syrian refugees in Lebanon in 2011. Through meticulous ethnographic work, Carpi reconstructs the framework of humanitarianism in Lebanon, focusing on two areas of particular significance in the two afore-mentioned

moments: the southern suburbs of Beirut, al-Ḍāhiyyah, which is crucial in the context of the 2006 war, and the region of ʿAkkār in the north of the country—the border area become relevant after the outbreak of civil war in Syria and the subsequent wave of refugees poured out in that region. Carpi examines how emergencies modify the social and interpersonal relationships in situations where the state is absent and/or weak. Through this prism, the analysis of humanitarianism offers unexpected insight, reversing the victim-assisted logic and showing how the habit of living in contexts of ongoing emergency, but especially the relationship with actors of humanitarianism, produce attitudes that are, to some extent, virtuous or at least offer a different ending than the one that is expected.

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